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SENSITIVE

DEFENSE FOR DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE LEMKIN
STATE FOR NEA DAS SPIRNAK, NEA/PI, DRL/NESCA AND NEA/MAG

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SUBJECT: MOROCCO SCENESETTER FOR THE VISIT OF THE DEPUTY
UNDER SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
MR. BRUCE S. LEMKIN

1. (SBU) Summary: Mr. Lemkin, we are looking forward to your visit to Morocco. Morocco has been an exemplary partner in the struggle against terrorism, and it serves as a regional model for economic change and democratic reform. Our military and political cooperation is growing, and as a result, Morocco has been designated as a "Major non-NATO Ally." Morocco's principal foreign tie is with Europe and has advanced status with the European Union (EU). Morocco is one of our strongest allies in the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region, and its top priority is U.S. support for its position on the Western Sahara territorial dispute and for integration in North Africa.

2. (SBU) Morocco is a country "on the move", in the throes, albeit unevenly, of change and reform. Economic growth has averaged about six percent per year and investment, tourism and remittances have boomed, although they could be threatened by the global financial crisis. Slums are coming down, and according to official statistics, so is unemployment. Freedom of the press has expanded to a level not seen here ever before and beyond the rest of the region, but there are still some restrictions, and those who challenge them can suffer heavy fines, libel judgments and more rarely, jail. Political freedoms have grown as well, although they remain constrained by a system with roots going back hundreds of years. Neither the Parliament nor the 33 political parties with seats in it have much power. Most voters stayed away from the last parliamentary election, in 2007, which saw the first international observation ever, largely achieved and funded by the USG. Additional reforms could lead to democracy, but, with stability a priority, it could take decades.

3. (BU) The relationship between the U.S. and Moroccanair forces is a model of engagement between the two militaries. Military engagement is integral to almost all mission priorities, including economic growth, countering extremism and terrorism, partnership, and regional stability. The agreement to purchase F-16 fighter aircraft and T-6 trainer aircraft is at the forefront of a broader force modernization effort by the Moroccan military that can serve as the engine not only of modernizing military equipment but continuing the modernization and professionalization of Morocco's entire armed forces. The sales also will provide an opening for increased engagement with Africa Command's 17th Air Force. Your visit will serve to reinforce the strong U.S. commitment to providing the Moroccan Air Force the very best capability for the dollar in an F-16 program that continues to have small setbacks that contribute to low-grade friction. We also seek to revitalize our military training and exercise regimen, underline our interest in the Moroccan military as an international peacekeeper, and help move the pending Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA). The Moroccans are mulling over a near-finalized text of the latter and are giving serious consideration to our proposed SOFA. Since King Mohammed VI serves as his own Minister of Defense, we expect that you will meet Minister-Delegate Sbair, who largely serves as a comptroller, CHOD Bennani and Air Force commander Boutaleb, who has been invited to the U.S. by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force for a counterpart visit. End summary.

Air Force Engagement and the Mission Strategic Goals

4. (SBU) Mission strategic goals are, in order, economic growth and reform, countering terror, promoting U.S.-Moroccan partnership, enhancing democracy and governance, and resolving regional conflicts while maintaining close strategic cooperation. Military-to-military engagement in general and air force engagement specifically contribute to progress for at least four of these goals. With regard to economic growth and reform, we believe expanding Morocco's economic base will do as much to address popular dissatisfaction with the political system as will strengthening democratic institutions. The purchase of F-16 and T-6 aircraft, and the enhanced engagement they will trigger, will likely promote modernization in a military already fully under civilian control. With regard to countering and combating terrorism, U.S. military engagement is focused on professional training and education programs.

With regard to partnership, our engagement with the Air Force is among the strongest peer-to-peer relationships we maintain, and this can only improve with the addition of the F-16 and T-6 to their baseline. The continued and expanded

robust interaction between our two militaries is an important example of institution building that is a centerpiece of our relationship. Finally, with regard to regional stability, the reinforcement of the Moroccan military helps to maintain the regional balance of power, in a context of even greater Algerian modernization expenditure, assures the Government of Morocco that it truly is a strong, long-term Major non-NATO Ally, and facilitates U.S. regional objectives not only in Africa but in the Middle East.

----- Military Modernization -----

15. (SBU) The Moroccan military has undertaken a sweeping effort to modernize a military force that fields predominantly Korean and Vietnam War era equipment. While the F-16 and T-6 sales form the vast bulk of the dollar figure for this modernization, the total Foreign Military Sales and Foreign Military Financing portfolio totals some 120 cases in excess of USD 3 billion. The list of pending or prospective sales includes 200 M1A1 main battle tanks, CH-47D and SH-60 rotary wing aircraft, Gulfstream and Beechcraft operational/Distinguished Visitor (DV) support aircraft, Hawk, Chaparral, and Stinger anti-aircraft systems, and solicitations for surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles. Morocco is the second largest recipient of excess defense articles (EDA) from the U.S. These sales and transfers are necessary to permit the Moroccan military to both hold its position as a regional power and be able to interoperate and participate as a coalition partner. They further serve to solidify the substantial U.S. inclination by the Moroccan military, although there are competitors that can dramatically underbid U.S. offerings, and Morocco does not limit itself to U.S. equipment.

----- Modernization Drives Engagement -----

16. (SBU) Military modernization further strengthens the institution of the Moroccan military by continuing and expanded exposure to U.S. doctrine, tactics, techniques, procedures and personnel. The expanded requirement to train operators and maintainers for the F-16 and T-6 aircraft alone will practically equal the current annual training allocation for all Moroccan personnel across all the services and government organizations. Moreover, the integration of a fourth generation fighter into the Royal Moroccan Air Force must stimulate a modernization of the full-spectrum approach to operating and sustaining such aircraft, from facilities to logistics to aerial employment to command and control. This provides an unparalleled opportunity)- and a challenge)- to shape our engagement with the Royal Air Force. However, we think the challenge can be ably met by a combination of our traditional security cooperation efforts and the addition of the 17th Air Force (AF), the USAF component command to Africa Command. A superb boost this year is the selection of Morocco to participate in the CSAF Counterpart Visit program, as well as Morocco's decision to send an observer to AMC's Airlift Rodeo. These engagement activities add to a robust exercise program that includes AFRICAN LION, PHOENIX EXPRESS, and FLINTLOCK, in addition to at least two annual JCETs. The Royal Moroccan Air Force has also requested the revival of MAJESTIC EAGLE, an annual air exercise that the U.S. suspended due to OIF and OEF commitments in 2003.

----- Modernization Can Drive Regional Leadership -----

17. (SBU) The Royal Moroccan Air Force enjoys a well-deserved status as a regional leader in training, humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping. With regard to training, Morocco has provided technical and operational training to more than 300 officers and 1,400 non-commissioned officers, primarily from francophone sub-Saharan Africa over the last 25 years, with much of that occurring in the last three years. Morocco has further provided humanitarian assistance to 13 countries in the same time frame, especially airlift but also cloud-seeding. Finally, Morocco has been a consistent provider of peacekeepers to UN and NATO-led missions, with forces currently in Kosovo, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Morocco continually seeks the expansion and improvement of capacity

to train peacekeepers and perform these missions, and the USAF can assist with both materiel and intellectual support for the concepts of a C-130 refurbishment center of excellence and a UN-sponsored peacekeeping center of excellence.

----- Support for Longer Term Issues -----

18. (SBU) The Embassy is currently engaged in negotiations

with the GOM on a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and Inspector General of the Armed Forces General (CHOD) Bennani has indicated interest in signing the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) with the USG. However, the negotiations over the SOFA have been ongoing for years, and the ACSA signature has been stalled for months; we have most recently heard the draft is under review by the military. The Moroccans, who hosted U.S. bases throughout the Cold War, may not be convinced a full-fledged SOFA is needed. Unfounded rumors of prospective U.S. basing in connection with Africa Command have been publicly controversial here. Nonetheless, both of these agreements stand to benefit air forces in particular, and your support for these two efforts would be appreciated.

Your Meetings

19. (SBU) Your meeting with Minister-Delegate to the Prime Minister in Charge of the Administration of National Defense Abdurrahman Sbai could be used to deliver Amendment 1 to the F-16 Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA) and further discuss the continuing effort to establish an interest-bearing account on Morocco's behalf that could close the disconnect between desired capabilities and budget in the F-16 program. Your meetings with Generals Bennani and Boutaleb afford an opportunity to discuss the F-16 and T-6 programs, as well as military modernization in general. You should stress to the Moroccans how much these aircraft will change the way they operate and urge them to allow adequate time and effort to prepare their bases and their forces. Of particular interest will be emphasizing the importance of base activities at the main operating base of Ben Guerir and the pending COMSEC LOAs as part of the recent NSA approval for Link 16 and other F-16 technologies. With the first aircraft set to be delivered in July 2011, the GOM has many challenges ahead to prepare infrastructure from both the operational and security perspectives. In all your meetings, we believe that you could also usefully advance the ACSA and the SOFA and obtain a better understanding of Morocco's planning for peacekeeping and for exercises.

External Issues

10. (SBU) Border Troubles with Algeria: The Moroccan relationship with Algeria is difficult, and the border between the two countries was closed by Algeria and remains closed. While the King and other GOM officials have publicly proposed opening the border and upgrading bilateral relations between the two countries, their entreaties have been repeatedly rebuffed. The GOA has linked progress on the border to "all issues," particularly the Western Sahara.

11. (SBU) Western Sahara: Moroccan foreign policy is dominated by defending and seeking international recognition of its sovereignty claims over Western Sahara. The issue remains the most visible source of tension with Algeria, which has historically supported the POLISARIO's quest efforts for independence by way of a UN-sponsored referendum. The issue led Morocco to leave the African Union and has been an obstacle to regional integration through the Arab Maghreb Union. In April 2007, Morocco proposed a new autonomy plan for Western Sahara, and a series of UN-sponsored negotiations with the POLISARIO began in Manhasset, New York. The Moroccan proposal, deemed "serious and credible" by the USG, would provide Sahrawis, the indigenous people of Western Sahara, autonomy in administering local affairs while respecting Moroccan sovereignty over the territory. There have been four rounds of talks but none since March 2008. After the April 2008 renewal of the mandate of the UN peacekeeping mission, the USG announced it considered independence for the territory

"not realistic."

12. (SBU) Western Sahara Continued: Following the controversial lapsing of the contract of the former UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy, the UN selected retired U.S. Ambassador Chris Ross to be the new Personal Envoy, and he made his first visit to the region in February.

13. (SBU) Western Sahara Continued: Western Sahara experienced gross violations of human rights from 1975 until the end of the Hassan II regime and repression intensified after the short-lived Sahrawi "intifada" of 2005. Since late 2006, Morocco has slowly improved the human rights situation in the territories. Arbitrary arrests have sharply diminished and beatings and physical abuse by security forces have all but disappeared. Even dissenters now can travel freely. They cannot, however, publish or speak publicly in support of independence, or a vote on self-determination. In 2008, known abusers were transferred, further easing the situation. However, we saw an uptick in abuses in early 2009.

Internal Issues

14. (SBU) Current Government: Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi's government, formed after the September 2007 legislative elections, is built on a minority coalition.

There has been periodic speculation that it might not last for the full five-year mandate of Parliament. El Fassi's government, filled with young technocrats from within and outside his Istiqlal party, has performed better than many expected, however, and it now looks capable of a full term. El Fassi has participated extensively in international events and diplomacy. Internal democracy is growing within political parties. A political formation founded by Fouad Ali El Himma, an intimate of the King, has evolved into a new Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) by grouping several smaller parties. It has now constituted the largest political bloc in Parliament, and could be prepared to lead should the current coalition falter. We currently see no prospect for a significant shift in Morocco's foreign and security policies. However, neither Parliament nor the Prime Minister has much say in these issues, which are managed by the Throne directly with concerned ministries.

115. (SBU) Parliamentary Reform: Morocco's political parties and the bicameral parliament are weak and structurally hamstrung from taking legislative initiatives or strongly articulating dissent. The Parliament provides no effective check on the monarchy or government. Changing the Constitution would be necessary in order to change the power imbalance and institute formal democracy, but both Parliament and parties will have to improve their capacity and performance first. Nonetheless, both parties and Parliament have made some technical improvements, largely thanks to USG-funded programs from the National democratic Institute (NDI) and the State University of New York (SUNY), which have modestly improved the body's administrative capacity. These include establishment of a budget analysis office, a verbatim transcription service, and a consistent forum for training and debate among parliamentary members and staff.

116. (SBU) Parliamentary Reform Continued: Although the September 2007 parliamentary elections were the most transparent in the country's history, record low participation (i.e., 37 percent of registered voters) reflects the lack of voter confidence in the institution. The State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funded NDI to run the first ever international observation. MEPI is now funding an ambitious training program for women running for municipal councils in June.

117. (SBU) Human Rights and Reform: King Mohammed VI has embarked on an ambitious and continuous program of human rights reforms that includes the Arab world's first truth commission, a revised family code and growing governmental transparency and accountability. 2008 saw some incidents of concern related to freedoms of expression and press. Although Morocco is a paragon of reform in the region, the reforms are still not deeply rooted in law or Constitution and could be rolled back. Continued support and encouragement from partners like the United States and Europe are essential.

118. (SBU) Religious Freedom: The Moroccan Constitution

provides for the freedom to practice one's religion, although Islam is the official state religion. The GOM prohibits the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials, bans all proselytizing, but tolerates several small religious minorities. It also occasionally restricts Islamic organizations whose activities have exceeded the bounds of "acceptable religious practice" and become political in nature) lately targeting Shi,a. Morocco has become protective and even positive toward the tiny remnant of its once substantial Jewish minority.

119. (SBU) Counterterrorism: The terrorism threat in Morocco emanates especially from small grassroots radical Islamic cells, which have shown some capacity to attack. Security forces disrupted six terrorist and foreign fighter cells in 2008, arresting 105. The biggest threat is that attacks could deter tourists, an important component of the economy. The GOM's implementation of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy emphasizing vigilant security measures, counter-radicalization policies, and robust international cooperation has been largely successful in containing the threat to date. Economic disruption, whether from attacks or the global economic crisis, remains the principal threat to stability here, but most observers believe Morocco will manage absent catastrophic collapse.

120. (SBU) Counterterrorism Continued: Under the King who as "Commander of the Faithful" leads Moroccan Muslims and Jews, Morocco has standardized religious doctrine, consolidated control over religious schools, and sent specially trained Imams to Europe to preach moderate messages to the Moroccan diaspora. The vast majority of Morocco's population rejects Salafist and Wahhabist approaches to Islam and so does not support terrorist groups.

Economics, Trade and Assistance

121. (SBU) Economics and Trade: The economy is relatively healthy, with growth expected to be above five percent this year, but marred by increasing disparities in wealth. Since implementation of our Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on January 1, 2006, bilateral commerce has more than doubled. U.S. firms are increasing their investment in Morocco, seeing new

markets develop as a result of the FTA. The Department of Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency conduct capacity building and technical assistance projects to assist Morocco to create an open and transparent trading environment and fully develop its trading potential. However, significant export growth to U.S. and other markets will also depend on Morocco's ability to capture a larger share of value added in its export products. Targeted assistance programs from USAID and MEPI aim at improving Morocco's ability to produce and market its exports in key sectors.

122. (SBU) U.S. Assistance: We are focusing our assistance to Morocco on youth and women, targeting four priorities: economic growth, counterterrorism, democracy and governance, and supporting quality education. U.S. assistance includes projects under the Millennium Challenge Corporation, USAID, and MEPI.

123. (U) The Millennium Challenge Corporation signed a five-year, USD 697.5 million Millennium Challenge Account Compact with Morocco in 2007 to reduce poverty and increase economic growth. The five-year clock started ticking on September 15, 2008 with the Entry into Force of the Compact. The MCA will support five major projects selected for their potential to increase productivity and improve employment in high potential sectors of Morocco's economy. The MCA projects include: Fruit Tree Productivity, Small Scale Fisheries, Crafts, Financial Services, and Enterprise Support.

124. (U) Morocco benefits from several MEPI programs, including country-specific projects and inclusion in regional efforts. Some recent and ongoing programs include the program for women candidates, breast cancer awareness, support for civil society and youth organizations, developing freedom of expression via the Internet, supporting development of democratic leaders, technical assistance to meet environmental obligations under the FTA, political party training and capacity building, and the Financial Services Volunteer Corps. In 2007, MEPI funded the first-ever international observation of the Moroccan parliamentary

elections. Other USG-funded projects support anti-corruption efforts (with the American Bar Association) and prison reform to undermine the foundations of extremism.

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